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SUBJECT: BRITISH POLOFF ANALYZES "COMMON POSITION" ON CUBA

HAVANA 00012488 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The UK's human rights officer in Havana shared with us June 15 her thoughts on the European Council's recently released draft conclusions on the EU's "Common Position" toward Cuba. (The draft states, among other things, the EU's commitment to seeking dialogue with both the Cuban Government and the internal opposition.) Political Officer Melanie Hopkins (protect) described a deliberative process in which the Czechs and Poles advocated a more confrontational approach, while Spain, Italy and to a lesser extent France favored engagement. These differences resulted in the absence of any mention of GOC participation in national-day celebrations, Hopkins said. She added that British and other European officials in Havana are hopeful that the EU will earmark special funds for the creation of a major Internet center at the EU diplomatic office in Havana. She said there is intense EU interest in Oswaldo Paya's "Program for All Cubans," a democratic transition plan. Britain is set to pass Canada as the top source of foreign tourists in Cuba. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The UK's human rights officer in Havana, Melanie Hopkins, analyzed on June 15 parts of the European Council's recently released draft conclusions on the EU's "Common Position" toward Cuba. The draft states the EU's commitment to seeking dialogue with both the GOC and the internal opposition. Hopkins hailed the draft's criticism of the deterioration of the human rights situation in Cuba, its call for the release of all political prisoners, and its concern over acts of repudiation targeting dissidents. (Note: Initial reaction by Cuban human rights activists to the draft has been mixed. Oswaldo Paya of the Christian Liberation Movement told us that the draft doesn't go nearly far enough. Leading Lady in White Miriam Leiva, on the other hand, expressed appreciation for the draft's "goodwill." End note.)

EU INTERNET CENTER IN HAVANA?

¶3. (C) Hopkins said the EU's stated commitment to "use the fullest range of resources" to offer all sectors of Cuban society "practical support towards peaceful change" refers to the "tens of millions of Euros piling up in Europe in aid rejected by the Cuban Government." She explained that British and other European officials in Havana are hoping that the EU will earmark these funds for the creation of a major internet center at the EU diplomatic office in Havana, thus easing pressure on European missions to open costly and labor-intensive Internet centers of their own.

NO MENTION OF NATIONAL-DAY CELEBRATIONS

¶4. (C) Hopkins said that because of disagreements between EU members, the Common Position draft does not address the issue of GOC/dissident participation in European national-day celebrations. (The issue is politically charged; last July 14, Bastille Day, the French Embassy invited Cuba's Foreign Minister, prompting dissidents to carry out an unauthorized protest at which nine persons were detained. All remain in prison nearly one year later, without formal charges.) The British, and not alone among European missions, opted not to hold a national day party this year.

TRANSITION PLANNING

¶5. (C) The British poloff conceded that the Council's decision "to start working on a mid- and long-term strategy on Cuba" is Euro-speak for "transition planning." She said Council members can be grouped into three categories. The first, urging a hard line on the Cuban Government, consists of Poland and the Czech Republic, she said. At the other end of the spectrum are Spain, Italy and sometimes France, who favor a policy of non-confrontation. Somewhere in the middle are Britain and other "countries for whom human rights is an important issue, but not the only consideration."

DISAPPOINTMENT OVER ROLLOUT OF PAYA PLAN

¶6. (C) Hopkins said there is keen EU interest in Oswaldo Paya's "Program for All Cubans," a plan for a peaceful transition to democracy, including a draft Constitution. She said the British Government regards the program as "one of the biggest things that's happened in Cuba in years, in terms of human rights." However, she said her government was disappointed that Paya and his colleagues have not

HAVANA 00012488 002.2 OF 002

distributing the Program more effectively. She said the news is "fizzling out." (Note: Paya told us that the GOC has intensified its campaign to confiscate Program copies distributed by members of Paya's nationwide network of activist. End note.)

BRITISH TOURISM INCREASING

¶7. (C) Hopkins also said Britain, with 220,000 visitors to Cuba annually, is about to surpass Canada as the top source of foreign tourists, according to GOC statistics. "I'm not sure it's a good thing," she said. She said British visitors tend to come in families, as opposed to many of the Italian and Spanish tourists. Many of the latter, particularly those aged 55 years and above, are male and interested in Cuban female company.
PARMLY